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OMS VIEWS ON DRUG ABUSE

The Office of Medical Services has for some period of time been concerned with the matter of drug abuse and its effect on the Agency, its personnel and their dependents. Interest has been a two pronged one -- the evaluation of applicants for employment in terms of drug use and abuse and secondly, the providing of medical assistance and guidance to on-duty personnel and their dependents who become identified through various mechanisms to OMS as having a drug abuse problem.

As a result of this interest, a policy was developed several years ago in terms of cases of applicants on whom there is information concerning drug abuse. This policy was developed in conjunction with the Office of Security and Office of Personnel and was recently reviewed and rewritten based on experiences since it was first initiated. A copy of that policy statement is attached as a separate document (Attachment 3). There are some applicants who are disqualified for Agency employment because of drug abuse. About 75 applicants per year refer to drugs on the Personal Index completed during their initial processing.

The following statistics are furnished by the Office of Security in regard to applicants known to have used marijuana prior to employment but have been approved for entrance on duty. Approval for EOD is qualified by a warning by the Office of Security in relation to Agency service and continued use of marijuana. From January 24, 1969 through September 15, 1969 there were 24 such cases; from September 15, 1969 through June 15, 1970 there were 56 such cases; from June 15, 1970 through September 30, 1970 there were 44 such cases.

There have been no cases brought to the attention of OMS involving drug abuse in employees. There have been a small number of cases of dependents being considered for PCS travel abroad with their parents in whom the matter of drug abuse has been surfaced during the medical processing. Unfortunately, in some cases OMS has felt obliged to recommend against residence abroad.

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Other cases involving dependents and drug abuse have been surfaced in various parts of the world. In some instances the entire family has been returned to the United States for a combination of reasons: security, administrative and medical.

However, from the total number of cases of which OMS is knowledgeable, there does not appear to be an epidemic of drug abuse in Agency personnel or their dependents. This is not to say that there are not individual cases of drug abuse which in and of themselves are tragic and serious medical problems.

Recently, the Office of Medical Services professional staff held a series of meetings to discuss this topic. An attempt was made to answer what appeared to be three basic questions:

What problems does the Agency face in drug abuse?

What is being done?

What needs to be done?

From and through these meetings the extent of the problem was defined as has been outlined in previous paragraphs.

The policies established in relation to employment were reviewed and reaffirmed as proper. The policies in relation to OMS processing of candidates for overseas were likewise reexamined and found appropriate.

Through Consultative Services, Agency personnel at headquarters have been seeking advice, guidance and referral for treatment, primarily for dependent children. Tests for identifying unknown drugs are available in OMS and are being used. Literature has been made available in the OMS waiting room area. Currently, a display of dangerous drugs is being prepared and is scheduled for setting up in the main corridor on 5 November. Professional staff members from the office have given lectures to security office personnel and to recruiting officers on this topic to assist them in their respective duties.

Judgments were made from that series of meetings that other steps could and perhaps should be taken. Among these are the following:

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a. The development and publication of an Agency policy statement on drug abuse. Such a statement has been developed and is provided as a separate attachment (Attachment 2).

b. The addition of diagnostic screening techniques to the capabilities of the Clinical Division and the Selection Processing Division. The Clinical Division now has the capability, utilizing chromatography equipment, of establishing from samples of blood or urine the presence of four categories of dangerous drugs. These are the amphetamines, the barbiturates, the tranquilizers, and the opium alkaloids. The process is a somewhat time consuming one and, if done routinely, would require additional equipment and laboratory personnel. At present there are no satisfactory laboratory techniques available to test body fluids to determine the presence of LSD, peyote, mescaline or marijuana.

c. The further exploration of various means of education of Agency personnel.

In review and by way of summary, the subject of drug abuse is an emotionally laden topic which arouses a great deal of interest in any group. This has been so amongst OMS professional staff. It is a complicated, perplexing, frightening, tragic subject. There are medical, legal, sociological and economic aspects involved. The Office of Medical Services, along with other DDS components, has been interested in this topic for some time. Interest and activity in OMS on this subject remains at a high level.

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